



LEADERSHIP
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TOMORROW

YOUR VOICE

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Director – LIFT

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ding-Jo H. Currie is the distinguished faculty of higher education leadership and founding director of Leadership Institute for Tomorrow. She is former chancellor of Coast Community College District.

At this pivotal moment in higher education, we need to ask a daring question:

What is our vision for the community college of the future?

The question is both urgent and necessary at a time when higher education is being reshaped by shifting policies, changing enrollment patterns, evolving public opinion, and the rapid advance of technology.

What is the path forward for community colleges?

I invited contributors to imagine: *What should this unique system of community colleges be in the future? How might it be transformed to meet the needs of students and communities ahead?*

Sophie Khouri, a community college student trustee and a graduate of early-college high school, takes us into the heart of what “community” in community college truly means. Sophie wants us to see beyond statistics and data, and focus on the basic needs, belonging, and student voice as the foundation of success. Her vision inspires us to reimagine our colleges not just as a place of learning, but as vital hubs of support and engagement.

Building on that call, **Dr. Rowena M. Tomaneng** posits a sweeping and equity-centered roadmap

for the future. She envisions community colleges as dynamic civic commons and centers of learning, healing, innovation, and community life. Rowena wants us to see colleges not just as educational institutions, but as engines of justice, belonging, and joyful innovation.

Matthew Dawood urges us to ground the future in accessibility, technology, and dialogue. He reminds us that ensuring that students of all abilities thrive, deepen human connections, and foster open dialogues along with critical thinking are not optional, but essential to future community colleges. He especially calls for learning environments to be inclusive, human-centered, and intellectually stimulating.

Dr. LaTonya L. Parker-Parnell, president of the Academic Senate of California Community Colleges, upraises the indispensable role of faculty leadership in shaping the future. Indeed, she envisions colleges where faculty utilizes AI for the human touch of teaching, and where participatory governance has elevated diverse voices. Her vision moves from access to belonging, enrollment to holistic investment, and from tradition to new transformation.

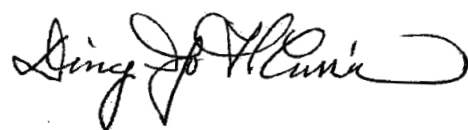
Dr. Sharon McMahon, a classified professional, offers a vivid look at connection becoming reality and living philosophy. She imagines a future community college to be a place where students receive wraparound support coordinated by a team, and food is recognized as central to culture and community through innovative programs.

Suzanne Lee Chan, in her compelling reflection, grounds the future in her personal and policy making dimensions. From her own early experiences of exclusion, she carries a lifelong commitment to creating spaces of equity, safety, and belonging. As a trustee and statewide leader, she calls for bold reforms so that community colleges of the future can remain catalysts of transformation.

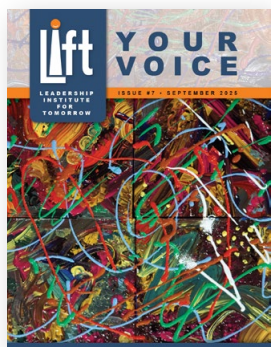
Dr. María L. Villagómez offers a bold and inspiring vision for the community college of the future — one that transcends borders, embraces technology, and places equity and student agency at its core. Her reimagining of virtual access, modular learning, and

global connectivity challenges us to think beyond traditional models and to embrace transformative possibilities. She reminds us of our responsibility to ensure that higher education remains accessible, relevant, and life-changing for generations to come.

Dr. Martha M. Parham, senior vice president of public relations at the American Association of Community Colleges, brings this issue to a close with a call for collective power and voice. By leveraging both data and stories — data to capture the mind, stories to capture the heart — colleges can advocate more powerfully for their role in transforming lives, careers, and communities. Her message is clear: Community colleges must recognize their collective strength and speak with a unified voice as the leading force for America's future.



O N T H E C O V E R



The artwork on this cover was created by participants of the Leadership Institute for Tomorrow 2025. Each leader began with an individual canvas, expressing their own colors, shapes, and boldness — the unique brand and character they are building as future leaders of community colleges. Yet, when their four canvases were placed side by side and bound together with sweeping splashes of paint, a larger picture emerged. The pieces became whole only in connection with one another, reminding us that no vision of the future stands alone. The vibrant, thriving future of community colleges can only be built by the collective — leaders, students, faculty, trustees, and staff — each contributing their strengths and virtues to form a shared masterpiece.

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I'm the Future of Community College, and Major Changes are Unavoidable



SOPHIE KHOURI

*Senior, Middle College High School /
Contra Costa College
Student Trustee,
Contra Costa Community College District*

Looking back on my first time on a community college campus, I was both intimidated and excited by the looming buildings, the vast number of resources, and the diverse student population.

At 14 years old, I enrolled in an early college program at Contra Costa College. I was thoroughly impressed by all the opportunities that I wouldn't have had at my regular high school.

Although I had limited knowledge about community college, I had always understood it to be a center of community support and engagement. I have several family members who attended community college and praised it for being an affordable, welcoming, and supportive environment.

Four years later — well-adjusted and accustomed to college life — I can't help but feel disappointed. I learned that the diverse student population isn't being sufficiently met with the resources they need.

Starting my role as student trustee, I ask myself, what can I fight for to improve the college experience? At every turn, I have been met with responses that detail the lacking of basic needs, inadequate support from college governance, and scarcity of student involvement.

With that in mind, I envision a community college of the future, and I see a community college: a hub for the surrounding community. For example, necessities such as food, health resources, and emergency housing should be available for all students and local

residents. I picture a community college where food banks are frequent and open to the public. A campus with a multi-faceted health clinic to provide basic personal health resources, mental health counselors, and medical assistance. A shelter where the homeless can turn in emergencies.

Currently, I witness college administrators and governing board members who limit their focus to statistics, such as graduation rates and course completion. Although these numbers are crucial to measuring growth, they neglect the correlation between meeting the basic needs of students and student success.

There must be drastic changes to ensure that students don't go to class hungry, worry about where they will rest their heads at night, and struggle with mental health while juggling coursework. This is especially crucial for low-income first-generation communities which are particularly vulnerable.

We cannot rely on the college's governance to establish these programs to build this community college of the future. Student-centered, needs-based services must be advocated by student voices. There must be student involvement in decision-making because those decisions directly impact their college life. Students must oblige themselves to participate. Administrators, faculty, and staff should simultaneously encourage student involvement instead of limiting it.

All things considered, a community college of the future emphasizes community. This includes the local community and engagement of the student body. Basic needs are not limited to students, governance prioritizes basic needs alongside academic success rates, and students are involved in decision-making processes.

Someday, I hope I will look back and this vision will be a reality.

Reimagining Community Colleges: My Bold Vision for 2030 and Beyond



ROWENA M. TOMANENG, Ed.D.

*Deputy Chancellor
California Community Colleges*

As we confront profound technological, environmental, and social change, we are called to reimagine California's community colleges as dynamic centers of innovation, equity, and belonging.

Our colleges have long served as gateways to opportunity, especially for first-generation students, immigrants, working adults, and communities that have been historically and systemically excluded from higher education.

Vision 2030 provides us with a bold, equity-centered roadmap to meet this moment.

Teaching and learning must be transformed into a collaborative and culturally affirming experience that integrates generative artificial intelligence in ethical and human-centered ways. AI can help us scale personalized learning, enable multilingual support, and surface early alerts to keep students on track. But the heart of our classrooms will always be our faculty, who must be supported to innovate and lead in this new era. Open educational resources, zero-textbook-cost pathways, and digital equity must be foundational, not aspirational, so that excellence is accessible to all learners.

Our colleges must also become *centers of community life*. We know that education does not happen in isolation. Campuses should serve as civic commons, with welcoming spaces where people of all ages come to learn, create, heal, and build community. Whether through early college pathways, adult education, mental health hubs, or digital learning centers, we must take college to where people live and work.

In shaping the *future of work*, community colleges will be agile engines of economic and racial justice. We are uniquely positioned to lead equitable workforce transformation by co-designing career education with employers, unions, and community-based organizations. Vision 2030's focus on high-road training in health, green energy, education, and AI-aligned careers reflects our commitment to living-wage outcomes and upward mobility for all.

Governance for the future must be participatory, data-informed, and equity-driven. We must ensure that district governing boards reflect the communities they serve and include diverse voices, especially students and community partners. Decision-making must be guided by actionable data and centered on dismantling barriers to access, persistence, and completion.

In this future, *students are not just recipients of services; they are co-creators of change*. Our systems must honor their lived experience, recognize learning in all its forms, and offer flexible, hybrid, and accelerated pathways. Mentorship, cultural validation, and leadership opportunities must be embedded into every student's journey.

To realize this vision, *funding models must evolve* to support equity goals, student success outcomes, and regional impact. We must invest in transformation, not just enrollment. Public-private partnerships, community reinvestment, and outcome-based funding will be key to ensuring sustainable and just growth.

If I had a magic wand, the California community college of the future would be open 24/7, both physically and digitally. It would be culturally sustaining, equity-centered, and joyfully innovative. It would feel like home, like hope, like possibility.

Together, we can — and must — build this future now.

Why Tomorrow? How to Start Building Future Community Colleges Today.



MATTHEW DAWOOD

*Director, Disability Support Services
Cypress College*

My vision for the community college of the future is one that ensures access to an education, utilizes artificial intelligence to increase a sense of community, and fosters an authentic intellectual environment where relational dialogue is valued.

Community colleges have long served as institutions of education and enrichment for our communities, providing pathways to earn academic degrees, transfer to four-year institutions, gain valuable skills through career and technical education, and achieve personal growth through non-credit instruction. As our communities and the needs of our students evolve, educators must be proactive in building the community college of the future today.

The community college of the future should be one that is designed for everyone. It is our duty as educators to strive to create an environment where all individuals regardless of ability can fully participate in educational programs.

This should be a guiding principle embedded into every decision, from planning infrastructure to incorporating instructional practices that support different learning styles. When we work to ensure that everyone, including students with disabilities and non-traditional students, can succeed, we create a more inclusive environment.

Another important component for the college of the future is leveraging technology. In the early 2000s, captioning a VHS tape meant manually transcribing audio and then encoding it as analog captions, which was a labor-

intensive process that could take hours or days. Today, video captions can be generated automatically with an increasing accuracy, and VHS tapes are obsolete.

Now imagine a few decades from today when artificial intelligence has streamlined many of the processes that are currently performed manually. What could that future look like?

AI can be transformative in higher education if it is utilized in an intentional manner. By leveraging AI to reduce time spent on manual tasks, valuable time can be redirected toward directly engaging with students. This shift will allow employee roles to evolve from task-oriented to people-centered, enabling staff to make meaningful connections with students and foster a sense of community.

Finally, the community college of future must be a place where ideas are not just taught but explored and challenged. It should be a space where students, faculty, and staff feel empowered to question, debate, and grow together as a diverse learning community, and where relational dialogue and critical thinking are cornerstones of academic culture. In times when polarization may discourage meaningful discourse, the community college can serve as an institution where relational dialogue thrives.

Creating the community college of the future is not just about implementing new technologies or building modern buildings. It is about ensuring access, leveraging AI to increase human connection, and promoting the open exchange of ideas.

With accessibility, a human-centered approach to technology, and a culture of dialogue, community colleges can continue to be engines of opportunity and innovation for future generations of students.

Redefining the Possible: A Concept for Evolving Students and Faculty



LaTONYA L. PARKER-PARNELL, Ed.D.

*President,
Academic Senate for California
Community Colleges
Professor/Counselor,
Moreno Valley College*

Our community college system stands at a defining moment.

As the needs of our students and communities evolve, we are called on to not only to respond but to lead with clarity, courage, and compassion.

My vision for the future of California's community colleges begins with a simple but enduring truth: We remain the most powerful gateway to opportunity, equity, and transformation in the nation. To remain that, we must embrace bold change with intentionality and collectively.

In the college of the future, teaching and learning will combine the best of emerging technology and the irreplaceable power of human connection. While artificial intelligence will expand access to information and streamline administrative tasks, it can never replace the cultural responsiveness, humility, mentorship, academic rigor, and enrichment that faculty bring to the learning experience. Faculty must be at the center of AI integration, ensuring that it enhances and centers equity-minded teaching.

Participatory governance must also evolve to become more inclusive, collaborative, and action oriented. Faculty, classified professionals, students, and administrators should co-create solutions informed by both data and lived experiences. We must intentionally amplify the voices of historically under-resourced and under-served groups and empower students to help shape the institutions they attend — not just through feedback, but through leadership and design.

Our colleges must also shift from merely providing access to ensuring true belonging. Imagine campuses that serve

as communities of healing and hope, with embedded wraparound services, mental health resources, and flexible, student-centered pathways. Programs like **Umoja**, **Puente**, **Extended Opportunity Programs and Services**, and **Rising Scholars Network** will no longer be considered supplemental; they will be central to how we define student success.

To support this vision, funding models must move beyond enrollment-based metrics and instead reflect the holistic needs of our institutions and communities. Sustained investment in faculty development, equity initiatives, and curriculum innovation will be essential. Equity cannot be an afterthought; it must be embedded in every policy, every practice, and every budget.

The colleges of the future must be a place where policy is grounded in purpose, where every student feels seen and valued, and where faculty are empowered to lead meaningful change.

This future is built not on assumptions, but on listening, learning, and acting with cultural humility. It requires us to recognize the diverse lived experiences of our students and colleagues, to question systems that don't optimally serve, and to remain open to growth as we co-create more just and inclusive learning environments.

With intentional leadership and a shared commitment to equity, we can build a system that continues to do better, enriched with diverse voices and reflecting the luminosity of our communities and the transformative power of education.

The community college of the future demands bold, equity-centered leadership rooted in cultural humility and collective purpose. By reimagining our institutions as spaces of shared power, inclusive innovation, and human connection, we can transform how we teach, govern, and support.

Together, we can build a future that reflects student brilliance and redefines what is possible.

My Vision for Fostering Community College Students of the Future



SHARON McMAHON, PH.D.

*Instructional Assistant
Long Beach City College*

My ideal community college is where every moment of the student experience is considered through a stigma-free lens. It's where programs and policies are designed to reflect our shared needs and values rather than our differences, and where learning, community, and support are seamlessly integrated.

At my ideal community college — an aspirational model I'll call Future CC — being connection-focused is not just a talking point, but a philosophy infused in every action of every employee every day.

At Future CC, every student is provided with personalized wraparound support coordinated by their assigned counselor/advisor. The burden of seeking and obtaining support services, currently a frustrating multistep process riddled with offramps, is shifted from the student to the counselor. This flipped approach enables counselors to efficiently procure the right support through their institutional knowledge and networks, and keeps students on track.

At Future CC, every student who commits to full-time status is guaranteed a part-time job on campus or in the community. Students feel genuinely supported, and community business partners benefit from having reliable, hard-working Future CC students as employees. Degree completions and university transfers are sure to soar with this mutually beneficial, forward-thinking policy, a true win-win.

At Future CC, campus dining is about much more than food. The college's groundbreaking all-access food service model is a student-centered collaboration between the culinary arts department and hospitality

industry partners. It recognizes that proper nutrition is essential for learning and productivity, and sharing food is a social ritual that breaks down barriers, builds community, and promotes mutual understanding and respect.

Through an innovative funding strategy, this bold forward-looking model eliminates financial stress and stigma by providing freshly prepared, nutritious on-campus meals and snacks with no out-of-pocket costs for students and only minimal costs for employees.

The model also provides popular student jobs that emphasize transferable skills, and internships for hospitality career paths; hospitality is one of the fastest-growing employers. It also includes cross-departmental cultural programming, including community fundraisers like "dinner and a show" events with Future CC's theater arts and music departments.

It's easy to imagine this innovative model for campus dining being the indisputable heart and soul of the Future CC community. It will be no coincidence that the stigma-free model improves persistence and retention for all student demographics, and increases Future CC employee satisfaction.

At Future CC, there is a culture of connection that permeates every aspect of life in every corner of the campus: From the flexible classroom spaces where students enjoy interactive learning with dedicated, supportive faculty, to the many communal spaces throughout campus where mutually rewarding informal mentoring relationships between students and college employees develop organically, based on shared interests, experiences, and backgrounds.

At Future CC, thanks to institutional mentoring behaviors and practices, students thrive in the face of adversity and persevere with confidence. Students and employees cannot avoid feeling cared about at Future CC; it's in the air.

Bringing Community Colleges (and Their Financing) into the 21st Century



SUZANNE LEE CHAN
陳李素英

*Board President,
Community College League of California
Trustee,
Ohlone College, Fremont*

“Ching Chong Chinaman! You eat rats! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

The snickers and jeers directed at the 7-year-old daughter of Chinese immigrants are still as vivid as if it happened yesterday.

Why was I being targeted? Because I was small, didn’t speak English, and the only response that I could muster was to cry – which is precisely what those schoolyard bullies wanted.

Growing up in the Midwest, raised in a Chinese Laundry and later a Chinese restaurant, this scenario of harassment occurred over and over – the exclusion, othering, and isolation resulted in low self-esteem that made me question my self-worth. I longed to be like everyone else, to fit in, to belong. It was an illusive dream beyond my grasp.

These traumatic childhood experiences were the impetus for my passionate and determined focus to create a future where others can thrive in environments of equity, security, and inclusion. It is my commitment to social justice and a desire to foster environments where everyone feels valued and belongs that motivated me toward elected public service.

While Fremont’s vice mayor and a city council member, I amplified the Asian American voice to secure due recognition for our inherent value, significant contributions, and the overall collective well-being of our community.

As a member of the Ohlone College Board of Trustees, we are equally committed to support and empower our president to create inclusive and safe environments where students feel welcomed and feel a sense of belonging. Our students can freely discover their own self-worth, thrive, and celebrate their accomplishments.

Now, as president of the Community College League of California Board of Trustees, I’m working with colleagues to support equitable pathways and resources enabling Student Success statewide.

What do I envision as the ideal community college of the future? A few thoughts:

- An educational experience that supports lifelong learning, regardless of age, finances, employment or background.
- California Community College per-student funding parity with California’s public K-12, Cal State and UC systems.
- The long overdue modernization or elimination of the antiquated “50% law” continues to hamper proper allocation of funds considered to be non-instructional such as basic needs, technology, counseling, and library services. Currently, a complicated formula in state law requires community college districts to spend at least half of most education spending on salaries and benefits for classroom instructors.
- Support and advocacy for the expansion of baccalaureate degree offerings within our California Community College System.
- Partnerships with local employers to foster relevant corporate education/training programs to meet the ever-evolving workforce needs.
- Integration of comprehensive teaching of artificial intelligence. Acquiring AI literacy is a fundamental and necessary skill for every student aspiring to achieve success in their future endeavors and careers.

The future’s ideal community college will be a catalyst for personal transformation, igniting creativity, building strong connections, and empowering individuals to reach their fullest potential.

Too aspirational? Unrealistic? I think not – the inner Suzie Lee’s voice compels and reminds me:

“We got this! Our students are counting on us.”

I See a Tuition-Free Future with Virtual Learning and Tools to Succeed



DR. MARÍA L. VILLAGÓMEZ

*Assistant Superintendent /
Vice President of Academic Affairs
Santa Barbara City College*

My vision for the community college of the future is one that transcends geographic boundaries and is accessible to students from all socioeconomic groups across the globe. It would offer state-of-the-art virtual learning settings where students can engage in live or asynchronous learning in interactive and intelligent environments. Equity of access would be the foundational principle of this model.

In these settings, students would have the flexibility to attend classes at any time, with fellow learners from around the world who would ensure there is always a cohort of students online, fostering an around-the-clock learning community.

These settings would be staffed by a diverse team of instructors located in various time zones who would rotate in shifts, ensuring that no matter when a student logs in, an instructor would be available to engage and teach. Language barriers would be eliminated by integrated translation technologies.

Each student would receive a “virtual learning kit,” ensuring they have the necessary tools and technology to actively participate. Learning would be offered in modules, organized by topic. For instance, a student looking to improve public speaking could enroll in a standalone module focused on that skill. This approach would honor individual learning goals and life circumstances, while preserving academic rigor.

Students would accumulate hours by completing a variety of modules aligned with their career aspirations. Students would leave reviews to inform future learners, which would help ensure instructional quality.

Based on the student’s customized topic selections, the platform would generate and automatically award credentials with titles that reflect their studies. Rather than objectives or student outcomes, curricula would

emphasize job readiness by embedding industry-specific skills that students could showcase to potential employers.

In an age where personalized experiences are the norm, whether in entertainment, shopping, or health care, education must follow suit. Why shouldn’t our teaching and learning environments be just as customizable or personalized?

This system would be tuition-free, on the condition that students complete the credential for which they enrolled. To support completion, students would receive a monetary incentive upon graduation.

In this reimagined setting, students would have agency, choosing their instructors, customizing their schedules, and selecting services that meet their needs from the comfort of their own room or home. Much like selecting a healthcare provider, students would browse staff profiles, view peer ratings, and make informed choices.

Beyond the technological advancements, leading the future of community colleges requires a willingness to embrace long-lasting transformative change. As educators, we have the privilege and responsibility to create and sustain a system that has opened the doors of higher education to those who might otherwise be left behind in poverty.

However, sustainability demands foresight. We must anticipate sweeping changes in demographics, politics, technology, and economics. The worldwide decline in birth rates, for example, signals a future with fewer traditional college-age students. We must ask ourselves: Are we investing in quality education over quantity?

My ideal college is one where systems are streamlined, focused entirely on student success and not bogged down by bureaucratic inefficiencies. It is a place like home where students want to attend, not where they feel obligated to attend.

With collective will, innovation, a strong commitment to access, equity and excellence, and with love for our students, we can build a larger community and this future together.



BEST PRACTICE COLUMN

BY MARTHA M. PARHAM, Ed.D.

*Sr. Vice President, Public Relations
American Association of Community Colleges*

Ask almost anyone and they will know about community colleges. Whether they attended themselves or know someone who did, these uniquely American institutions are no secret.

Community colleges of the future, as today, will be built upon a foundation of unwavering commitment to affordable, accredited, and accessible higher education opportunities. More than 10 million Americans are served each year by these institutions where offerings reflect the needs of their local communities.

For years as I advocated for California's community colleges in Sacramento or in Washington, D.C., I heard many stories from legislators about their fond experiences with community colleges.

But did they know the whole story? No doubt you have used your own data to advocate for the needs of your college. Clearly communicating the impact that reliable support — or a lack of support — for future programs and services is critical.

Locally, colleges can use data to share their stories with policy makers and funders. Data is shared to capture the *mind*, but student success stories capture the *heart*.

How do you start your college's odyssey to the future?

- **Study your data.** Understanding your college's data is the first step in strengthening your voice.
- **Look at your data through different lenses.** Analyze the numbers with different contexts in mind. Consider the impact of internal and external factors.

- **Share information.** Connect with colleagues and share challenges and successes. Find commonalities and determine ways to advocate in tandem.
- **Enlarge the circle.** Are there more community colleges in your region? California has agencies that work with all their community colleges to advance initiatives — but what about your county or region? Consider other sectors as well. Partnering with universities, businesses, and civic organizations will not only strengthen your voice but can enlarge your audience.
- **Engage.** Seek ways to tell the story of community colleges. Get involved at the local level with the chamber of commerce or other civic organizations. Go to your board of supervisors' meetings and provide a public update. Send a team to Sacramento or invite legislators to visit the colleges in the region.

What if we took that to the next level?

Nationally, 39% (nearly 6 million) of all undergraduates are attending community college and paying about one-third of the cost of attending an in-state public university.

Lending your stories to the national data helps us all to tell our story; one that is truly illustrative of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

Workforce or career and technical education programs are often touted in Washington circles as a valuable resource for students looking to get into the job market without amassing crushing debt. I am sure that you have powerful examples of innovative programs that provide training to fill the local workforce pipeline.

Continued on page 13

Continued from page 12

Imagine the impact of relaying the stories from all those programs from a national perspective.

The data is there and is powerful. Your stories lend even more power.

Consider the first-generation student who never imagined going to college and is now transferring to a university. Or the single parent working two jobs and learning skills that will help qualify for a family sustaining wage job.

There is great power in the ways in which the community college vision, mission, and values guide the way forward as we transform lives, careers, and communities. The stories we can tell go beyond the data. Like our colleges, they are transformative.

Let's stand together in the power of our brand with a unified voice to transform the hearts and minds of the nation and ensure that community colleges of the future remain a valued investment for the next generation of Americans.



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Dr. Ding-Jo Currie, LIFT Director

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P U B L I C A T I O N

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A Special Invitation to President and Chancellors:

NATIONAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE CEO THINK TANK

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